![CCRC Community College Research Center — Teachers College, Columbia University]

PRESS RELEASE

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Regardless of Background, Online Students Drop Out More Often Than Classroom Counterparts

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, 14 July, 2011 - A new study from the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, has found that community college students who take online courses are more likely to drop out than their counterparts who attend traditional classes.

The five-year study, which tracked 51,000 students enrolled in Washington State community and technical colleges in 2004, found that although students with greater educational preparation were more likely to enroll in online courses, they were also significantly more likely to fail in or withdraw from them than from traditional "face-to-face" classes. Students who took higher proportions of online courses were also slightly less likely to attain a degree or transfer to a four-year college than those who took fewer online courses.

The findings are similar to those from an earlier study (by the same authors) of community college students in Virginia and suggest that while online learning continues to offer critical flexibility to students and institutions, it does not offer a perfect alternative to the classroom experience.

The study provides much needed insight into the effectiveness of online learning as its popularity grows exponentially. Almost 30% percent of college students enrolled in at least one online course in 2009 – a stunning 21% increase in numbers from the previous year. That increase is in contrast to the less than 2% increase in the overall higher education student population.

As community colleges increasingly make use of the advantages proffered by online learning – the ability to share resources with partner institutions and offer a wider array of courses to students – the authors point out that pedagogy and support structures must be enhanced to ensure the success of students who avail themselves of online learning options.

To that end, the study offers several suggestions to increase supports for students, who have often complained of feeling isolated and technically confused when enrolled in online courses. Suggestions include requiring students take tutorials prior to enrolling in online courses, integrating online technical,

academic and non-academic supports into the course itself and providing training for faculty in effective online pedagogy and curriculum design.

To read the complete study, please visit: http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=872. For the Virginia study, visit: http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=813

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The Community College Research Center (CCRC) (http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/) is the leading independent authority on the nation's nearly 1,200 two-year colleges. Founded in 1996, CCRC conducts research on the major issues affecting community colleges in the United States, identifying practices and policies that expand access to higher education and promote success for all students.